



Withdrawn

Thom Donovan

“Withdrawn” is a draft of a forthcoming book of poems and other texts. Like my first book, *The Hole* (2012), it responds to conditions of friendship, community, and the relationship between private and public life during a series of ongoing disasters, both global and local, actual and virtual, ecological and geopolitical. In the process of writing *The Hole* I realized that what separates a “book” from a collection of texts has something to do with the book’s potential to model and activate certain forms of gathering. So I suspect that “Withdrawn,” to become a book, will require years still of extension and further thought about what its own gathering could mean. Thanks to the editors of *BOMB*, *The Offending Adam*, *Peacock Online Review*, *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, and *WITH + STAND* where some of these texts have appeared. Thanks also to Aryanil Mukherjee for inviting me to put this draft together in a PDF form for his MUD project.

Withdrawn

for Leslie Scalapino

Everything will be taken away...

Or what I mean by this can't matter
The grave will just be a hole
My self some sense of self
Will be a hole when I am done singing

A place where I lost you of course
Where I stopped world forming
There would be a politics in this
If loss could be felt and not seen

It is easy not to sing
The face withdrawn from smoke
Different than a soundtrack
Which never was for us

Expressing this limit that face
Makes signals in the air
Only that face understands
Because it can't stop remembering

The total catastrophe that was the line
Or the face wishing this
Wishes invisibly
In a language of these days

We became crossed-out
You burned your photographs
To remember home

~~A kind of body torn apart~~
~~A kind of body shared~~
~~A kind of body no one shares~~

Wishing the mind
To touch anything
But this combat

Combating, that is,
To touch you
And touching

Only dark, a room
Full of dark
All voices eyes

All I's be hushed
Sensed so stricken
As of in silence blowing

Whereupon the woman
You are the man
The skin sheds us

She singles herself out
Pointing out the lack of
Form in her self-apprehension

A failure to withdraw from
Them because every
Thing is in relation

What it would take
To name ourselves
Into unblind threat
To maintain this threat
And through it call
‘Self’ into being

Black light, black light
Of the light-skinned
Face cornered
In the room (any
Place whatsoever by
Your camera)

Any name, by the name
We would assume
How it would
Accuse an angle
And without alibi
Unworld

If they are not paid
To eat any fucking
Thing they want to eat
Whenever they want to

And not abide
By their illest purchases
On wanting to be
On wanting
To be in the world

The scar that could be made on their backs
Will be made on their backs
Because we can

The scar that is someone's power
To pay them and never
A living wage is a striking thing

Living in this discrepancy
The risk of losing you in me
Becomes something to sing

Nearly in the sea like "water is in water,"
Land within land, dreams with dreams

But then there are things we see with our desire
The deaths we are also with, apart inside us

Swell sometimes, speak to me a barometric
Of address and the consequences of not speaking

Of withdrawing from what we say, to another
Wilderness the dark will not pray for us

The dark will be a ground we recover in the night
Illegitimate, turning to those other bodies

Those others who are the only spirit, the only health
We will have known, going to them like conditions

To imbibe the harm that also involves us
Like forms for an approaching wreck.

The Leak

Disaster's the national pastime
Shame's the natural course
Of hegemony sovereignty equals
Its weight in force

Disaster knows no limit
Limited only by the eyes
That see it not the decibels
Charged by their screaming

Rubble sees in retrospect
From the distance of their failed
Infrastructure from the distance
Of dispossession a kind of curse

Of progress what dispenses
With the ego society no force
Of nature accomplished this
Because we've gone global

And seeming
And a semblance
They flee
From us

The products leak
What one has been
Will be

Like a hole
In the transmissible
Air the sea
Is anarchy

Deregulating
Birds wings
Landing
Whole worlds

In imploding
Debt
Who gives
Their word?

Who are called upon to leak
All barriers of the same
And what we are and when
We are not reconciled

The way the ground rose up
Spills our guts makes us, um,
Come clean; spreads the
Shittiness around at least

Endless streams of stars
Crossed by song unweaved
Recall what won't be sung
Because no one is dreaming

It seems I can almost touch
The plume they cannot plug
Me up with currency and currents
Touch everything we'll never be

Copulas of cant
Evacuate what's left of place
Signify while real eyes watch
A wreck of belief

Not even time to mourn it seems
The loss of me as you
The event and the time this event
Takes place within without name

Because you were moving with it
Interrupted by the social
Interrupted by how language
Mediates the social

There is still a horizon here
A rose rim for the real.

Mic Checks

"the ear is the only orifice that doesn't close"
--from Sharon Hayes' *Parole*

Your silence blows the
Ears off my head

So that what I'm hearing
And what isn't seen
Structures the rupture

What's left-over
From speaking privately
In a public place

Some ways to imagine
Not being them,
Being crossed out
Or simply tongue-tied

If the tongue
Had eyes and they
Were here

If they
Looped like history,
Like the history of
A scream

Or steam from that
Whistle not yet blowing

The voices absent in this present
In their presence coheres a statelessness
Without subject

Sentiment is the tenuous
We screaming again,
Words one lip-synchs for their life

Discourse schools a public void
In private just because
You put a mic

On me doesn't mean my voice
Will carry

Or anyone is out there listening

We are archivable, which means
We can easily be forgotten

We are public, which means
We are double/multiple/substitutional

Through no lack of repression
Do the words finally appear

However private we are, however
Rich our interior life

[politics which pressures the inside out]
[politics will smoke us out]

[politics will drive us into the world]
[politics will drive us into the open]

Where any one may listen

To this resonance pattern
To these distances wherever you go
Voice a form of intimacy without control
Emotions before they formed and hardened
Into a public speech

Which summons us all these voices verbs
Recorded but not heard
Stricken from the record it would seem
Before sound could appear
Thinner than the thing-in-itself
The magnetism of all lost futures

In the breaks silence sticks
Wakes the dead from trace

The living from paradise
Semblance sleeps in our ears

Across eras cross-phasing
Hatch private spaces in public

Tongue in my mouth in
Your mouth mic checks.

The New Us

--after ACT-UP

When bodies become the case
Will they still be a poem
Or form of art or prose because
Grief is a form of action

When bodies become the case
Of all we cannot be
No art can prove or disapprove
Movement made a maze

Of skin when bodies became
The case an image they still needed
That would extend space that might
Buy some time, save some face

For the dying whose bodies became
The case and were a law
Living inside the heart like
The law was always made

Blood becomes a site
No glove will heal or hold
Steeped in what was left to fill
Until hell evokes a reason

They put their hands on us
No glove will hold or touch
The law their bodies were
When there was no justice

So all the lenses of your
Camera almost crack
But don't outliving the fact
Of their blood's gaze, its resolve

That all our laws lacked
The question of this subject
What the body can do
Determines a line of police.

--for Jerome Bel

The body is an archive
The breath a convolute
A collection sung for no one
But to remember it has danced

Compendiums when you point
With your eyes to what it did
And cannot do, this also being useful
The body fails but it survives

The body as an archivist
Kissing all relation, tells us what
We did, the failure of this doing
Called career, called smallest hope.

--for the Kootenay School of Writing

The mountains around the city
Sounds they make blue
On the retina in the ear
Resound a commons what will have been
The time of year not weather
Not the names of these
Places no longer there
The people we took never given back
To a useless and unused air

There are plenitudes in what we do not
Possess, in which sound dispossesses
Our future property took like the real
Announcing exactly where we are
In relation to who or what externalities
Banalities like belief

So hack spirit, come hack this
Spirit enclosure up, talk to the man
Like he won't come back from empire
Like power can't do anything about this

So hack spirit, hack me up
Take my name or don't take it
Multiplicity see if I care
Division matters because we are born
That strived-for-never-in-fact-
Existing-ever-imminent-commons
In our swagger in fact matters.

--after F.E.A.S.T.

Summons that we feeling
Certain things made
Gathering as a kind of making
An active question that storms our thinking
Called world, how we do
How we no longer called this 'us'
When a name was true
We lost our names
When loss was useful

Except capital
Except a certain
Knowhow the birds know
Their sense turning to sense
Their uneven development
Movements disaggregate
Subtracted from action
The air we make and the air
Which makes us
The *we stamp* and *we are stamped*
So complicity becomes the subject
So history isn't just a motor of mistakes

The new us starts from a dish
Not socialism, continues to grow
Sans system, an attention
To this consumption system, a local
Kissing of totality what will be value
And what's the use, in poking
Our heads out, food sovereignties
Produce this singularity

The new us, the new good life
Well being as muse and health
As wealth all we are saying's
The all new thing, new expression
Being shares this sense, of turning
Around a land, or land fills
Me up with emergence, political
Like a dish, we cannot help
Gathering around, or con/tem/plating.

--after a phrase by J. Morgan Puett

Let art lay fallow here
And artfulness since resistance

Fuels "the system," scratch that
Since resistance is part

Of an organum of control
A matrix of complicities

Stop the world simply let
It be useless, let be the silence

Of a different effort
Sing that it is elsewhere unframed

That conscience and com-
punction are a kind of form

Caring withdraws eclipsing
Art's acknowledged value,

The efficacies of its being for us,
Not an unspeaking thing.

I am testing a series of propositions about friendship and community which may or may not last in time or produce the results I would have wanted or intended

I am testing them against the tried ephemera of political action and reflection on this action called theory even while it may be occurring

No dream encompasses this contradiction between what we dream and how we wake up and an effective mode of action within a particular set of forces or relations

Thus the feeling one is doing nothing while one is in fact doing everything

One must act very specifically while maintaining the possibility of everything.

All Black

--after Fred Moten's *In the Break*

“It’s all black, I love us.”

(Jay Z)

I.

Death will come
For us it will call

Itself "scarcity"
The wind in the

Trees and meadows
Recall ruins re-

verse a process a
Social process if

We will be on time
And dust collects

What dust collects
On the things we

Built unsustainable
Like eros unifies

The ego it is a lan-
guage but I don't know

What it says shit
Builds like sound

Concrete in my head
No longer dreamt

Nor will waking
Discover me a memory

Trace, a set of planes
Traversing blue

Ghosts of a geometry
Your horns blow.

II.

What worlds end
So we can create

Sustain caesura
A break of each

And each recall
The sea a rhythm

Of this place pul-
sing under what

We dream emer-
gent in the ones

We name sing-
ularities what we

Cannot possess
What genealogies of

Men won't colla-
borate with history

Since history wo
n't corroborate

The sense of ru
ins revealing you

Dreaming us up
Not the other way

Around the sun
Clicks off and on

Soundlessly ab-
andoning to events

What we would
Call presence.

III.

--for Adam Pendleton

These shiny
Stone-like cubes
Obsidian of what

They speak an
Alphabet cannot
Be said it is

Too much just
To feel them
To have to

Form words
Before pictures
Is a problem

Of history but
You know this
The glissando

In our politics
Of attention gliding
Cannot know

Us or call
Us back to
Kill whitey

So easily as
Antagonism art
Thrown into

History and
Not wanting
To be

Thrown into
An archive
Becomes responsible

For opacity
Assume this
Power not

Quite one
Making nothing
In particularity

It waits the thing
Itself to know
Ourselves.

IV.

"It's holy work and it's dangerous not to know that 'cause you could die like an animal
down here."
--Abbey Lincoln

Like the heart was a line
Was a frame to break
A kind of intervention before
The score was made

Or everything could be written down
Totally administered worlds
Poetry becomes a score
It becomes a music that heard justly
Is never just heard

Performed but not played
To blow that supplementary horn
What we sing remains
Of that communication that is not their dreaming
Which is all a scream was worth.

The Archivist

--for Dave Nolan

Because you wanted the world to hear
What you heard
Ears are all we are sometimes
A moment of music on them

The details not the mirage of *hearing*
That's what the archivist sees
Like we were sometimes just eyes
No longer I when we see
Stein said that
Because the world is mindful

Of identity you were taping it
All the time even the noise even the blanks
Before they organized our memories
What was even searchable
As memory

How any of it could impress us
This is where music comes in
Structuring the thing otherwise
All that time with the tape on
Just in case there was music.

--for Robert

My friend when you go away
Into a medical emergency
An emergency of how living
Is practiced I miss you

I feel I am missing out
On my own life the consequences
Of which a building never
Materializing would make it true

Because the building is never
Built it remains a proposal
Or plan about how prosody
Lifts the body outside itself

How *ekstasis* cures
Your books remain to be written
Because the possible
Doesn't end with words.

--for Kathy & Jen

I want to make a park with you
Make a campfire in the park
Like Mylar crinkles like light
Is durable the light we make

I want to make a fort where
Melody was and our voices were
Where our voices became a
Collective cry in the lost air
And yet uplifted and somehow
Spoken

Not in heaven, not into its hands
Not enclosed the voices we do
The fences we defend,
Bodies full of pain unmake
The world because they are not just
A language, never were they full
Of grace the toxins structuring us.

--for Charles & Rit

Like names falling through
Old levels sounds like
In the open of the public
Eye we are vulnerable
Scrutinized not just for the poems
Sounds they make on the inside

How they still how they don't
Make us whole but the whole
World flickers the time
They take to get outside
And sense not just this sense
Of the mind's survival.

--for Steve

Spilled in the language's veins
A militant regard
When will words be
A tool for something other

Than exchange watching us fuck
Them up in the dance with
Forces again
The city shine with it

Little estates make a little
Shit out of me
You are everything
To me dear abstractions fleeting

View of the thing from the thing
In itself trees move with us
Our disappearance
We disappear the world therefore

Appears flashes with
Thoughts difference spreading
In these leaves
Bifurcating futures

Like elements *huckleberrying*,
Like language sometimes
Squats in us.

--for Rob

Criss-cross this chorus
Not marshaling us
The state of the soul or
The soul of the state
Is a formal feeling

An emotional thing
Swerving into the doing
Standing reserves and
Potential across personnel

Body of living labor
Gives me a sign
We are not done with you yet
This is the place we were born
And this the place we became

Slaves in an air other
Than our own
The indentured sing
Of power in a new form

But are not themselves we
Are not ourselves
Beholden to a brand
Locking the flavor in like value

If an emotion possesses us
If a theory of value signs
Off into the void let us rule
For another decade

Let our nets cast us larger
Than our appetites appear
For control or the armies
That we lead

With their hands blown-off
No longer forced to rule
Who will resurrect
What we could not feel
The first time?

--for Michael

The violence of this voice
Smoothed into place
Shared like reason becomes
Afraid and believes

From this cloud this hand
Of the police reaching down
Teaches us things suddenly
Like the animals once

Taught us to be headless
The mind utterly mindless
Made of flesh and blood
And covering the streets

Sites certain dissensus
It only knows seeing red
The mind bludgeoned
By a force without grace

Around the null set
Possibilities of planks
Intone our total abandon
Power ripples from

Pure means like white
Eschatology without end
Pierces the simple
Shapes of our art

Differences they make
Like machines on the skin
Harrows become operative
And run our mouths

A course of law could stand
No earth nor other
Orders of being
Crowned by its waste.

She's Lost Control Again

--after Mika Rottenberg's *Squeeze*

It's not clear whether
She's lost control again

Or if these ties the ropes
And pulleys are binding

One cherry leads to another
That's all we can know

Scented fetishes in the
Global village of the elect

Affect has made them abject
It has made a fool

Out of processes
A montage of the orifices

Coursing through power
Saying it dumb in the

Wind like a name
We all can't share

Fisting what's without
Fingering the constellation

Baser games of telephone
Tell the nails to grow

A tale of power
Told by the soul at work

If above or below
These powers the boxes
Kept moving
If this was a game
We were making the rules
Up as we went along
As though within our
Own bodies without control
She's lost control again
We're just beginning
To manage her limbs
Like assemblage we shit
We perspire autonomy
When they tell us to
Only there is no me
And there is no you
There is no beginning
In other words to this
Process this continuous
Product producing our
Exception

Like in a harrows we sweat
Like in a vacuum of political
Control called representation
Called media saturated

We wake to this machine
The women already wake spinning
Their hair as if from gold
A myth of morning

The animals who make them awake
And who assist with production
Form an assembly line
Within an otherwise post-Fordist refrain

One lays in the grass
Like a patient or an object
How these women they are husbandry
And husband and husbanded

I want to call this rhizome
The endless exploitation extending without roots
From a thousand holes where power leaks
Conspires and condescends on bare asses
The ass without a face, the dehumanized ass
The face upon which one couldn't reproduce
When all we could do was produce
The hours expand, click into place.

This Is Not a Performance

--for Adrian Piper

Gives me the back
The backside this dance
Does the butt but does it
Suffice to be an object

In this dance motherfucker
Reduced to steps, reduced
To hips, a kind of scream-
like script I am hinting at

Like shade light passes through
Light, like there was no
Beyond but what is social
What is a social material

Leaving me what's left-
over from the armor
Love makes up the difference
Motherfucker my only friend

Nice up this substance
Come shadow come on
Open up a window
Pull this ladder up into skin

Songs the object and songs
The subject refused to sing
Ring thought balloons
Make the black still truer

No equal signs, no commons
In this index of who you is
In the present
The archive betrayed us

Blindfolds around entire bodies
Like a pair of eyes all over
Your body, a dance that was both
A fusion and a wreck

The eyes remain the windows
Of the soul, but who looks in and
Who looks out's a question
Your body posed.

Blood Moon

--after Etel Adnan

Sometimes I feel
Like a fatherless daughter
A motherless father-
land under this sky
Overlooking blood

Tribe adrift with a
Flood of it, the
Inconsolable, unexplainable
Wreck of moral
Ressentiment, which

Like eyes replaced,
Like the heart re-
placed for politics,
For history, places
Blood came from

What you wouldn't
Bless then bless now
Isis, repair the
Labyrinth of those
Calls to be violent

Call forth women
To conquer their
Sons-filial-cells
To wreck identity
Replace it with

A new Indian-
Angel-step-moving-
me-up-to-the-sun,
Something older than
Blood—like a blood moon.

Back Figure

--after Rigo 23

Ruckenfigur in reverse
Her hearse reviews
Give me the back
Spoken like a true muse
In starving time
Speaks to power
What names our name
Withdrew

Through embroidery
An effort to send
These names renewed
Into time say my name
Motherfucker be mine
Lapse from relic to
Wanting you
Earth is our studio

So you want to be said
Into history so you want
That gaze to be for you
All turned around
Capsized from the cross
All revolving things which
Devolve to an act of anthem
Like seeing you wasn't
Simply enough
Like hearing you blew
My ears off

I, you, and we,
We have become dis-
enfranchised equals this
Desire to see your actual-
statuary-backside
Of the face you are naming

Power with
Speaking truth to sunset
By seeking out shadows
Folds of your robe
If with a backward look
Took'd from that flatbed.

Area

--after Renee Gladman

That little limit
Of the distance
Between ourselves

And the world,
Ourselves and event
Witnessing the haptic

Sense of the hand
Touching you,
The nipple tugged

And toggled
Beside one's self

That's what living's called
Unworked by everyday dreaming

Busses loop this place
We would be, this city

That might identify the body
If it were here

Or the crowd would not disperse

If we were anywhere
In this present and
Not dying from death

Which is different than
Actually having lived,
But not so different from
Writing –

A form of living with
Death inside a present
The words one writes
Withdraw us from.

Like a camera
Swoops in it
Swoons and we
Are not unlike
It gliding in
A sense of one's
Own appearance
Among others

Where we meet
Where the body
Touches other
Bodies,

Like a world was
Ending

Come to your senses
Come up from air, for air
From all this mumbo jumbo

The distribution of the senses
We are living in a grammar
Of commons, the most beautiful

Myth while actually not being
In common most of the time
The body breaks-up space

Does not grasp it, reassembles
The surround called sunshine
Already lapsed to an idea

Of me or you heat involves
The light from this incident
The forethought of our lives

In this event, not on the inside
Are you beautiful to me
For all time, but being

Inside-out and twisted
Like a territory we experience
In real time while observing

What we are when we are
Not writing, social substance like
A tracking shot makes 'me' area

And moment and movement
--a type of twice dying one
Experiences before their death.

Pod People

--for Leslie Scalapino

Thinking, Leslie, of your favorite movie—*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. I have often revisited this film, Philip Kaufman's remake of Don Siegel's original, wondering why it was your favorite movie. The film begins with these gauzy, cotton objects drifting in outer space (the pods!). They are making their way to planet Earth—San Francisco to be specific. There they will undertake their 'invasion' by releasing a substance into the atmosphere. A substance humans/citizens will take into their lungs while they sleep, mind-altering like a psychotropic drug redolent with late-60s utopian longing. This film, released in '78, looks forward and backwards. Backwards at the socio-political struggles of the 70s, of which I consider you a part—and the environmental movement in particular (in the film the would-be protagonists, Donald Sutherland and Brook Adams, work for the EPA). Forwards to a particularly dystopian decade, the decade in which I grew-up replete with Reaganomics, late-Cold War imperialism, culture war, and the replacement of erstwhile public servants and citizens with 'pod people'—people seemingly soulless; an exaggerated version of the people our public institutions and policies would often seem to want us to be. The backdrop to all of this, like in the Dirty Harry movies also set in San Francisco, are these residues of social progress and struggle, forces represented by the counter-cultural non-conformism of Jeff Goldblum's character; the flakey pop-psychology of Leonard Nimoy; and the subtle, yet inevitable, romance of Sutherland and Adams. Like the pods of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* something threatens our humanity essentially. Only this force, represented in the film, is not from outer space, or even really from outside us. And it is this fact to which your own work bears witness, phenomenizing it through a syntax which gives form to the primal rupture between 'inside' and 'outside'—where 'person' begins and socius ends; where interiority becomes radicalized by an external pressure of events, if not an empathy which overwhelms any account of individuality without exteriority (the need for friends, compatriots, lovers, neighbors, countrymen; the encounter with those inexplicably and mundanely 'other'). What I am saying—something I would like to say, rather—is that conspiracy infuses your work, rendering it potent. A conspiracy, on the one hand, which threatens the social frameworks and communities through which 'we' have no choice but to exist. And a conspiracy, on the other, of knowledge that any interior is

hopelessly dependent on the irrevocable connection of all beings, a fact underlying your particular brand of Buddhism, and your commitment to Gertrude Stein's experimentalism, and a landscape exceeding in its reality any visual or aural description one can make of it. The pods, and the pod people, and the network—the original 'social network' called city—partaking of 'us'! Dear Leslie, who invented an uncompromising grammar—a daring language practice—to embody our ceaseless correlation and conflict.